

Andrew Jackson to Thomas Jefferson, August 7, 1803, from Correspondence of Andrew Jackson. Edited by John Spencer Bassett.

TO THOMAS JEFFERSON.

Nashville, August 7, 1803

Sir , The late arrest of Colonel Thomas Butler¹ added to the novelty of the order upon which it is founded, has occasioned a number of the good citizens of this District, to apply to me, to state to you the real Charector of the Colo. during his command within this state; this application added to a real desire that you should be made acquainted with the true charector of the Colo. under his present circumstances and the sentiments of the citizens with regard to him induces me to write you.

¹ Col. Thomas Butler was a Revolutionary soldier of distinction and served with great gallantry in St. Clair's ill-fated expedition in 1791. When the regular army was reorganized in 1802, he became colonel of the 2d regiment. In 1797 he was sent to Tennessee by Washington, to expel settlers on the Indian lands, and it was in that service that the incident occurred to which Jackson refers in this letter. His stern soldierly qualities made him popular in that country. The Col. Robert Butler who later served as Jackson's adjutant-general in the New Orleans campaign was his son. Jefferson replied, Sept. 19, to Jackson's letter and said that the important charge against Colonel Butler was disobedience to orders.

Shortly after Colo. Butler reached this state, the removal of Judge Campbell from off the Indian lands, and his arrest by military authority occasioned a great noise, and the circumstance was notified to the then delegation in congress, by a letter from Judge

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Campbell which was laid before Mr. Adams then President. Shortly after an explanation Took place between the Judge and the Colo. friendship was restored, and the thing there ended without enquiry whether the Colo in the arrest, had acted strictly within the powers given him by the Government. Leaving this solitary act out of view, as far as I have seen, heard or been informed the people of this state has always found in him both the citizen and soldier. he has by his conduct as an officer, by his strict probity and honesty endeared the citizens to him, in short Sir the removal of such an officer, for the disobedience of such an order would raise unpleasant sensations in the minds of the citizens as it is thought [by] many to be renewed for the express purpose of driving the colo. out of Service as his well known attachment, to his locks (which he had wore as an ornament untill they had grew gray in the service of his country) were such, that nothing but death itself could separate them from him. It is thought also that such an order, is approaching too near to the Despotism of a Sarrow² and better calculated, for the dark regions of the East, than for enlightened America. Should it be decided, that the heir is a part of uniform and subject to the order of the commander in chief, it may also be extended to the nose ear eye and so forth, they are all equally the gifts of nature, and all as much recognised by any written rules for the government of an army. The feelings of the militia are alive upon the occassion, as it is well known, that when in the field they are subject to the same orders, and liable to the same pains for disobedience. It opens a door for the greatest tyranny to be exercised by a commander in chief and by which he may deprive his country of the service of its most valluable officers, when he may think they

² Prince Suvárov, the Russian general, noted for his strict discipline, died in 1800. The German spelling of his name Suvarow, was common.

have become too honest, too economical too independant, to be subservient to his views.

To conclude I will just remark that, The novelty of the order, its renewal at the time it was, the uniform upright conduct of the colonel during his command in this state, his hospitality Politeness and attention to the citizens and those Passing through it, all combined to increase the wishes of our citizens, for his honourable acquittal and safe return, and in the

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golden moment of american prosperity, when all the Western Hemisphere rejoices at the Joyfull news of the cession of Louisiana, an event which places the peace happiness and liberty of our country on a lasting basis, an event which generations yet unborn on each revolving year, will hail the day, and with it the causes that give it birth, such Joy as these we hope will not be interrupted by the scene, of an aged and meritorious officer being brought before a court martial for the disobedience of an order that went to deprive him of the gift of nature which was worn by him both for ornament and convenience.³

³ The order to crop the hair was given by General Wilkinson, commanding in the West with headquarters at New Orleans. Colonel Butler's refusal was taken as an act of insubordination and led to his arrest and trial by court martial.